

# Cognitive Analysis of “Fog” Metaphor in Poetry of the Tang Dynasty

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## Abstract

In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is not only a linguistic device but also a mode of thinking that people use to conceptualize and comprehend the world. Conceptual metaphors are a set of mappings from a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain. The cognitive foundation of conceptual metaphor is a variety of human experiences. Poetry of the Tang Dynasty abounds with metaphorical images. Fog is a regularly used image in poetry of the Tang Dynasty. Yet the research on fog from the perspective of conceptual metaphor remains as an under-explored area. Based on conceptual metaphor theory, the current research aims to sort out the classification of fog metaphors and the cognitive foundation as well as cultural motivation behind those fog metaphors in poetry of the Tang Dynasty. The cognitive analysis of fog can offer a new dimension to the exploration of both the image of fog and metaphor in poetry of the Tang Dynasty. In addition, the cognitive approach to fog metaphor in poetry of the Tang Dynasty can better reflect the unique cultural cognition of ancient China, and extend the research on classical Chinese poetry, which is a step forward in cognitive poetics, and offer implications for the appreciation, translation and teaching of poetry of the Tang Dynasty.

**Keywords:** metaphor, fog, poetry of the Tang Dynasty

## 1. Introduction

Metaphor has long been regarded as a rhetorical device in which one thing is compared to another by saying that one is another. This traditional view has been challenged by a new view of metaphor proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980 in their seminal study: *Metaphors We Live By*, i.e., the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). Thus, according to the cognitive view, metaphor is a cognitive device for us to make sense of the world. In other words, to think in a metaphorical way is an everyday procedure which plays an important role in helping us comprehend our surroundings. Metaphor suffuses our thoughts, no matter what we are thinking about. Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 11). Cognitive metaphors arise from our embodied understanding, the experience of our physical presence in the world (Johnson, 1987). As a fundamental cognitive mechanism, metaphor is not entirely influenced by the universal bodily experience. Kövecses (2020) argues that conceptual metaphor theory would run into trouble if it is considered as a mainly or exclusively cognitive phenomenon since it is virtually very difficult to explain the comprehension and production of many metaphors without taking context into account. Metaphor is also governed by the exceptional cultural context. We can say that metaphor is rooted in both physiological and cultural embodiment.

Metaphor is ubiquitous both in thought and everyday language. Metaphor constitutes partially implicit descriptions of what it denotes and also provides subtle expressions. The implicitness and subtlety of metaphor enable it to serve as a useful device for writers and speakers who are not willing to be too explicit about what it is that they are talking about. Metaphor belongs to literature because implicitness and indirectness are the dominant characteristics of literary works. In classical Chinese poetry, metaphorical expressions and metaphorical thinking are widespread. For poets, metaphor provides a way to think and create. Poetry, through metaphor, exercises our minds so that we can extend our normal powers of comprehension beyond the range of the metaphors we are brought up to see the world through (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 214). Classical Chinese poetry is usually very short. Yet a variety of poetic devices are able to supply classical Chinese poetry with copious connotations. Metaphor, as a poetic device, plays a vital role in the creation of artistic beauty and rich connotations since one of the important functions of metaphor is to establish imagistic reasoning (Feyaerts, 2000). Poetry in the Tang Dynasty is an unparalleled system in the history of poetry, and thus achieves its reputation as a rarity of Chinese culture. Its great value lies in the ideal combination of thoughts and art.

There are plenty of metaphorical expressions in poetry of the Tang Dynasty. The metaphorical expressions are manifestations of conceptual metaphors whose source domains are usually physical and cultural. Fog, a common natural occurrence, has long been a popular subject of poetry and literature. Fog appears in poetry of the Tang Dynasty on a frequent basis and produces rich metaphorical meanings. But much less attention has been paid to fog metaphors from the perspective of cognitive linguistics in the study of poetry of the Tang Dynasty. Therefore, a focus on fog metaphor in poetry of the Tang Dynasty from a cognitive

perspective is able to cast new insights into the exploration of classical Chinese poetry and is also a step forward in cognitive poetics.

## 2. Conceptual Metaphor

In accordance with the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is regarded as understanding one conceptual domain through another conceptual domain. So, metaphor involves a relationship between a source domain, the source of the literal meaning of the metaphorical expression, and a target domain, the domain of experience actually being described by the metaphor (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p. 55). For example, argument, love, idea, life and theories are all more abstract concepts. We tend to talk about abstract concepts in terms of concrete concepts. So, we talk about arguments in terms of war, about love in terms of journey, about ideas in terms of food, about life also in terms of journey, and about theories in terms of buildings. This understanding is achieved by seeing a set of systematic correspondences, or mappings, between the two domains. A convenient shorthand way of capturing this view of metaphor is the following: CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B, which is what is called a conceptual metaphor (Kövecses, 2010, p. 4).

### 2.1 Classification of Conceptual Metaphor

In accordance with the cognitive functions they perform, conceptual metaphors can be classified into three types: structural metaphor, ontological metaphor, and orientational metaphor.

#### Structural metaphor

In structural metaphor, the source domain functions as a comparatively rich knowledge structure for the target domain. To put it in another way, the cognitive function of these metaphors is to make speakers understand the target domain with the help of the source domain. This understanding arises out of conceptual mappings between elements of a and elements of b. For example, TIME IS MOTION is a structural metaphor. “Motion” is a concrete event that people experience in real life. Therefore, people have developed a certain conceptual structure about the concept of “motion”. People tend to understand the abstract concept “time” by means of the conceptual mappings between motion and time, such as

Times are things.

The passing of time is motion.

Future times are in front of the observer; past times are behind the observer.

One thing is moving, the other is stationary; the stationary thing is the deictic center.

(Kövecses, 2010, p. 37)

This group of conceptual mappings constructs our notion of time in a clear way. TIME PASSING IS MOTION OF AN OBJECT and TIME PASSING IS AN OBSERVER'S MOTION OVER A LANDSCAPE are two special manifestations of the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MOTION in English and account for a number of linguistic metaphors, such as:

On the preceding day . . .

I'm looking ahead to Spring Festival.

New Year is coming up on us.

Time flies.

There's going to be trouble along the way.

Her stay in Shanghai extended over many years.

Mary passed the time in Russia happily.

We're getting close to National Day.

With the metaphor TIME IS MOTION, our notion of time would be concrete and clear. Without the metaphor, it would be hard to conceive our concept of time. The conceptual mappings can account for why particular expressions mean what they do; in addition, they also offer a fundamental structure for the compression of the target concepts. Most structural metaphors function in this way.

### **Ontological metaphor**

Compared with structural metaphors, ontological metaphors provide less cognitive structuring for the target domain. Ontological metaphors confer “entity or substance status” on concepts that are not intrinsically entities or substances (Haser, 2005, p.144). Ontological metaphors enable people to understand abstract target concepts in terms of objects, substances and containers because our experience of physical objects, substances and containers makes it possible for us to select parts of our experiences and identify them as tangible entities or substances so that they can be categorized, quantified and talked about. Ontological metaphors can be further subdivided into entity and substance metaphors, container metaphors, and personification.

Entity and substance metaphors enable people to view events, activities, emotions, ideas etc. as tangible entities and substances. For instance, in the metaphor INFLATION IS AN ENTITY, the treatment of inflation as a concrete entity makes it possible for us to refer to it, quantify it and find out the causes and respond to it. “Ontological metaphors like this are necessary for even attempting to deal rationally with our experiences” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 27).

Personification is the most obvious ontological metaphor since it enables the physical object to be treated as a person. Personification allows us to understand an assortment of experiences with nonhuman entities by means of human motives, attributes, and activities. Here are some examples:

His theory explained to me the behavior of chickens raised in factories.

Life has cheated me.

Inflation is eating up our profits.

Cancer finally caught up with him.

In these cases, theory, life, inflation, and cancer are not human entities, but are endowed with human attributes, such as explaining, cheating, eating and catching up. However, personification is not a uniform process. Each personification highlights different aspects of people. In other words, each personification picks out different aspects of human beings to talk about nonhuman entities. Through personification of nonhumans as humans, we are able to understand nonhuman entities better since personification draws upon one of the source domains we know best—ourselves.

### **Oriental metaphor**

Compared with ontological metaphor, orientational metaphor provides even less cognitive structure for the target domain. Orientational metaphor stems from the fact that most metaphors in this set are concerned with spatial orientations including up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral. These spatial orientations originate from our interaction with the physical world. In orientational metaphor, upward orientation tends to indicate positive evaluation, while downward orientation is connected with negative evaluation, such as MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN, HEALTHY IS UP; SICK IS DOWN, CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN, CONTROL IS UP; LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN, HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN, VIRTUE IS UP; LACK OF VIRTUE IS DOWN, RATIONAL IS UP; IRRATIONAL IS DOWN. The expressions like “I’m feeling up today.”, “He’s really low these days.” are specific manifestations of HAPPY IS UP/SAD IS DOWN, which is based on our physical experience. The upward body orientation indicates positive mood while downward body orientation reflects low mood. However, the mapping from source domain to the target domain in orientational metaphor is not just shaped by our physical experience; it is also determined by cultural experience. For example, in some cultures the future is in front of us, whereas in other cultures the future is at the back of us.

### *2.2 Working Mechanism of Metaphor*

The cognitive linguistic view of metaphor is that it involves a set of mappings from the source domain to the target domain. The source domains are typically concrete and physical concepts while the target domains are fairly abstract and less-delineated concepts. The source domains are easy to understand while the target domains are very difficult to comprehend. Thus, mapping some features of the source domain to the target domain can help people understand the abstract target concepts.

According to Kövecses (2010), the most frequent sources include the human body, health and illness, animals, plants, buildings and construction, machines and tools, games and sport, money and economic transactions, cooking and food, heat and cold, light and darkness, forces, movement and directions while the common target domains are emotion, desire, morality, thought, society/nation, politics, economy, human relationships, communication, time, life and death, religion, events and actions.

Conceptual metaphors follow the principle of unidirectionality: the metaphorical mappings

typically go from concrete source domains to abstract target domains. In other words, metaphorical mappings from source domains to target domains are not reversible. Some aspects of the source domains and those of the target domains are brought into correspondence with each other in such a way that constituent elements of the source domains correspond to constituent elements of the target domains so that certain aspects of the source concepts are used to comprehend the difficult-to-understand target concepts.

Apart from the individual mappings that conceptual metaphors bring with them, they also carry rich additional knowledge because aspects of the source domain that are not obviously stated in the mappings can be inferred. When metaphorical mappings carry rich inferences, metaphorical entailment occurs. Here comes the question: Given the rich knowledge we have about tangible source domain, how much of it is actually passed on to the target domain? The answer consists in the invariance principle, which indicates that the conceptual elements that are mapped from the source keeps its basic structure in the metaphorical mapping; it is invariant. Thus, the invariance principle illustrates two things: (1) what can be carried over from the source domain to the target domain, and (2) what cannot be mapped from the source domain to the target domain and why. Given the aspect(s) that participate in a metaphorical mapping, map as much knowledge from the source onto the target as is coherent with the image-schematic properties of the target (Kövecses, 2010, p. 131). Ungerer and Schmid (2008, p. 119) also reckon that “The mapping scope of a metaphor is best understood as a set of constraints regulating which correspondences are eligible for mapping from a source concept onto a chosen target concept”. The invariance principle prevents the mapping of knowledge that is not coherent with the schematic structure of the target concept. Thus, it ensures that only those aspects of the source concept that do not contradict the schematic structure of the target concept can be carried over through the metaphorical mapping.

### *2.3 Cognitive Basis of Conceptual Metaphor*

Metaphors are ubiquitous in our daily lives. What is the cognitive basis for the production of metaphors? The traditional view of metaphor holds that similarity is the basis of metaphor, and similarity limits the choice of particular linguistic expressions to talk about something else. If two entities do not share similarity in some aspect, we cannot use one entity to talk about the other in a metaphorical way. This illustration of the basis of metaphor can apply to many situations. However, the connection between some examples like “digesting food” and “digesting ideas,” or between “We’re not going anywhere,” taken literally and “This relationship is not going anywhere,” taken metaphorically, cannot be accounted for by preexisting similarity in the traditional view of metaphor.

The cognitive linguistic view of metaphor reckons that conceptual metaphors cannot be predicted by preexisting similarity, but are motivated. According to cognitive linguists, apart from objective preexisting similarity, experiential basis or motivation can account for the creation of a metaphor. In other words, the foundation of conceptual metaphors lies in human experience, including correlations in experience, nonobjective similarity, biological and cultural sources shared by the two concepts, and possibly others, all of which may supply adequate motivation for the choice of a certain source concept instead of other source



concepts for the comprehension of the target concept.

### 3. Analysis of Fog Metaphor in Poetry of the Tang Dynasty

Fog is a captivating natural phenomenon, a cloud at ground level, where tiny water droplets suspended in the air blend to create a misty veil that can transform landscapes into mystical scenes. It occurs when the air near the ground cools enough for moisture to condense. Fog has long been a popular subject of poetry and literature, inspiring authors and poets to capture its mysterious and ethereal nature. Fog is a frequently used image in ancient Chinese poetry since it has rich implications. Yet the analysis of fog metaphor in poetry of the Tang Dynasty is an under-explored area. The exploration into the fog metaphor in the poetry of the Tang Dynasty provides a new perspective to look at fog imagery and thus promotes the appreciation, translation and teaching of the poetry of the Tang Dynasty in the world.

For the identification of fog metaphor in the poetry of the Tang Dynasty, we employ Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) proposed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) as follows:

- 1) Read the entire text–discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
- 2) Determine the lexical units in the text–discourse.
- 3) a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.  
(b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be
  - More concrete [what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste];
  - Related to bodily action;
  - More precise (as opposed to vague);
  - Historically older;

Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.

- c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current–contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.
- 4) If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.

(Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p. 3)

This scheme involves identifying as metaphor any lexical unit that possesses the potential to be processed metaphorically. The identification begins with determining all the lexical items in the text, then goes on to establish its meaning in context and find out whether it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts.

If there exists a more basic contemporary meaning, which is related to human body and tends

to be more concrete and precise, the analyst needs to decide whether its meaning in the text can be understood in comparison with this more basic meaning. If yes, lexical unit is identified as being “metaphorically used”.

Fog has been a source of inspiration for many celebrated literary figures in Chinese culture. With the aid of MIP, we have sorted out six categories of fog metaphor in the poetry of the Tang Dynasty, EMOTION IS FOG, BEAUTY IS FOG, WAR IS FOG, REBEL IS FOG, NOBILITY IS FOG and SECLUSION IS FOG. The following part will focus on the elaboration of these fog metaphors and their cognitive and cultural motivation.

### 3.1 Emotion Is Fog

As motioned in the previous part, according to Kövecses (2010), emotion is a superior target domain. Emotion is a natural part of being human and it is an inherently subjective psychophysiological human-state. Since emotion is a strong subjective feeling, it is not that easy to conceptualize this abstract concept. Emotion language is mainly metaphorical in many languages so as to express various intangible emotional experiences, just like what Kövecses (2000b, p. 20) said, “metaphor not only pervades the language people use about the emotions, but also it is essential to the understanding of most aspects of the conceptualization of emotion and emotional experience”. Emotion concepts such as anger, fear, love, happiness, sadness, shame, pride, and so on are primarily understood by means of conceptual metaphors.

Fog is a frequently used image in classical Chinese poetry for the poets to give voice to their inner feelings, such as ignorance, muddle, sadness, and longing.

#### IGNORANCE IS FOG

Emotions are, to a large degree, conceptualized from people’s embodied experiences in different cultural contexts. People’s vision usually blurs in the fog. Fog makes it hard for people to identify direction and distance, which gives rise to a sense of ignorance and uncertainty. Thus, the connection between fog and ignorance arises.

(1) 问以经济策，茫如坠烟雾。 (李白《嘲鲁儒》)

*Wèn yǐ jīngjì cè, máng rú zhuì yānwù.* (Lǐ Bái Cháo Lǔ Rú)

When inquired about the strategies of governing a state,

he was confused like falling into fog.

*Mockery of the Confucian Scholar from Lu*

In example (1), the poet compared the ignorance of the old Confucian scholar to falling into the fog when he was inquired about the strategies of governing a country. The old Confucian scholar from Lu had no idea about how to govern a country. The fog metaphor in this case vividly enhances the old Confucian scholar’s ignorance about managing state affairs. The mapping from the source domain, fog, to the target domain, confusion, is derived from people’s embodied experience in the Chinese cultural setting.

#### MUDDLE IS FOG



Based on human embodied experience, the state of mental confusion may arise out of the vagueness caused by fog. In example (2), the poet ascended a height on Double Ninth Festival. The road in the world, which is as risky as mountains and rivers, is compared to the road in life. The capital city was covered by fog, which symbolizes the unpredictability of the poet's official career. The poet's muddle about his official prospects and his ambition is highlighted by the fog metaphor.

(2) 世路山河险，君门烟雾深。 (刘禹锡《九日登高》)

*Shìlù shānhé xiǎn, jūnmén yānwù shēn.* (Liú Yǔxī Jiǔrì Dēnggāo)

The roads in the world are dangerous like mountains and rivers,  
the officialdom is unpredictable like fog.

*Ascending Height on Ninth*

Similarly in example (3), Xianjing, the capital city, is enveloped by smoke and fog. The capital city, usually the political center, is the place where people with lofty ideas tried to achieve success and win recognition. So, in this case the capital city, based on the metonymy LOCATION FOR LOCATED, stands for the poet's official career. Fog, as the source domain, is mapped onto his official career since his muddle about his official career is just like the heavy fog. Thus, the fog metaphor in this verse vividly presents the poet's perplexity about his official career and enhances the poetic creativity.

(3) 苍苍烟雾里，何处是咸京。 (崔湜《江楼夕望》)

*Cāngcāng yānwù lǐ, héchù shì Xiánjīng.* (Cuī Shí Jiānglóu Xī Wàng)

Amidst the fog of the vast expanse,  
where is Xianjing?

*Sunset View from the Tower by the River*

### SADNESS IS FOG

Fog also has the ability to evoke sadness. Sadness is a negative feeling. The universal trigger for sadness is the loss of a valued person or object, though this can vary greatly between individuals based on their personal definitions of value and loss. Sadness may haunt people and shroud people's hearts, which forms a connection between sadness and fog, and gives rise to the conceptual metaphor, SADNESS IS FOG. In example (4), the poet was going to leave his beloved friend. His moods are mapped to the heavy fog which shrouded the river and the ship. The description of fog on the river highlights the poet's sadness which arose out of his separation from his beloved friend.

(4) 凄凄去亲爱，泛泛入烟雾。 (韦应物《初发扬子寄元大校书》)

*Qīqī qù qīnài, fānfān rù yānwù.* (Wéi Yīngwù Chū fā Yángzǐ Jì Yuán Dà Jiàoshū)

Sadness arose from leaving the beloved friend,

the ship floated into fog.

*A Letter to Yuan Da Before Departure for Yangzi*

The poem, *Seeing Wei Ba off to Xijing from Jinxiang* in example (5) is a farewell poem. When the figure of the poet's friend disappeared, fog rose from the mountains. The poet did not express his sadness explicitly, but the portrait of the scenery conveys his melancholy in a figurative way.

(5) 望望不见君，连山起烟雾。 (李白《金乡送韦八之西京》)

*Wàngwàng bù jiàn jūn, liánshān qǐ yānwù.* (Lǐ Bái *Jīnxiāng Sòng Wéi Bā Zhī Xījīng*)

The figure heading west has gradually faded away;

fog rises from the mountains.

*Seeing Wei Ba off to Xijing from Jinxiang*

The poem, *Plum Rain*, in example (6) expresses the poet's loneliness and homesickness. The poet, who was from the north of ancient China, was not able to adapt to the climate in the south. The verses in example (6) describe the scene, fog extending to the southernmost land and clouds' covering the path to the northern ferry crossing. The poet's real intention is more than that. He uses fog and clouds as vivid images to express his distress because he was stuck in the south. He could not go back to the north and neither could he fulfill his aspiration in the capital city which was also located in the north.

(6) 海雾连南极，江云暗北津。 (柳宗元《梅雨》)

*Hǎiwù lián nánjí, jiāngyún àn běijīn.* (Liǔ Zōngyuán *Méiyǔ*)

Fog on sea extends to the southernmost land;

clouds on river cover the path to the northern ferry crossing.

*Plum Rain*

Example (7) is from Bai Juyi's famous long epic poem, *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, which criticizes Tang Xuanzong for his lust after Yang Guifei that led to An Lushan Rebellion, and also expresses his sympathy with the tragic love story between Tang Xuanzong and Yang Guifei, praising their timeless love. The verse in example (7) depicts the scene where Yang Guifei gazed down on the human world to try to find Chang'an, but she could only see dust and fog. Dust and fog, in this case, give prominence to sadness of the heroine, and thus to the whole poem.

(7) 回头下望人寰处，不见长安见尘雾。 (白居易《长恨歌》)

*Huítóu xiàwàng rénhuán chù, bùjiàn Cháng'ān jiàn chénwù.* (Bái Jūyì *Chánghèn Gē*)

Turning her head, she gazed down on the mortal world,

Chang'an could not be seen, only dust and fog.

*Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

In example (8), the cloud and fog act together as the source domain to express sadness of a wanderer. For the wanderer who is far away from home, homesickness is strong and boundless. The wanderer's sadness haunts him and shrouds his heart, which establishes a connection with fog and cloud. The description of cloud and fog among mountains and rivers portray a vivid picture of sadness in this poem.

(8) 山川云雾里，游子几时还。（王勃《普安建阴题壁》）

*Shānchuān yúnwù lǐ, yóuzǐ jǐshí huán.* (Wáng Bó Pǔān Jiànyīn Tí Bì)

In the cloud and fog among mountains and rivers,  
when will the wanderer come back?

*Written on the Wall in Jianyin, Pu'an*

### 3.2 Beauty Is Fog

Fog has the ability to inspire and awaken our senses, reminding us of the beauty and mystery of the natural world. Fog, especially mist, is pure and graceful, which is usually used to describe the beautiful landscape. Fog, thus, becomes an image of beauty and purity in Chinese literary works. These inspirations from fog enable poets to use fog as a source domain to foreground something beautiful in the poetry of the Tang Dynasty.

(9) 中堂舞神仙，烟雾散玉质。（杜甫《自京赴奉先县咏怀五百字》）

*Zhōngtáng wǔ shénxiān, yānwù sàn yùzhì.* (Dù Fǔ Zì Jīng Fù Fèngxiān Xiàn Yǒnghuái Wubǎi Zì)

Gracefully and gently, a beauty was dancing like a fairy in the hall,  
glowing like jade and mysterious like fog.

*Five-hundred-word Ode Before Departure for Fengxian County from Chang'an*

Example (9) portrays a scene in which a beautiful maiden is dancing in the hall. In the second verse, the poet uses smoke and fog to highlight the charm of the beauty because fog has the capacity to evoke beauty and mystery. The use of fog, together with 玉质 (*yùzhì*, jade-like skin) brings about the attraction of the dancer in the hall.

(10) 心精烟雾色，指历千万绪。（韦应物《杂体五首》其三）

*Xīnjīng yānwù sè, zhǐlì qiānwàn xù.* (Wéi Yīngwù Zátǐ Wǔshǒu Qīsān)

They focused on weaving dresses glowing like beautiful clouds;  
their fingers went through thousands of silk threads.

*Variety Poem (III)*

The poem in example (10) condemns the luxurious life of the ruling class and expresses

sympathy with the working class. Women weavers from underprivileged families were absorbed in weaving beautiful thin silk dresses, which looked like floating fog in the air. The use of fog as the source domain intends to foreground the beautiful color of the silk garment.

### 3.3 *War Is Fog*

War brings uncertainties, sufferings, worries, pains, and sadness to people. People have no idea about when the war will end. War often makes it difficult for people to see the future clearly. War is just like fog which brings people uncertainties and sadness. It is quite likely that this similarity motivates poets to enhance readers' perception of war by describing foggy scenes.

(11) 阵解星芒尽，营空海雾消。 (李白《塞下曲六首》其三)

*Zhènjiě Xīngmáng jìn, yíngkōng hǎiwù xiāo.* (Lǐ Bái Sàixiàqǔ Liùshǒu Qīsān)

The army fell apart and the starlight became dim;

The battlefield became empty and the fog on sea vanished.

*Border Song (III)*

The poem in example (11) describes the battle scene in the border. The dim light of the star in the first verse symbolizes the army's falling apart. In the second verse the disappearance of the fog symbolizes the emptiness of the battlefield. Both the dim light and the disappearance of the fog on sea are used to express the situation that the war was over. The vanishing of fog on sea, which symbolizes the emptiness of the battlefield, thus enhances readers' understanding of the end of the war on the border.

(12) 扬麾氛雾静，纪石功名立。 (李世民《饮马长城窟行》)

*Yánghuī fēnwù jìng, jìshí gōngmíng lì.* (Lǐ Shìmín Yìnǎ Chángchéngkū Xíng)

Fluttering flags symbolize the disappearance of fog;

engraved stones record the achievements.

*Watering Horses in the Great Wall Caves*

The poem in example (12) is a frontier poem, which describes the tragic scenery outside the Great Wall and the wartime scene. The verses in example (12) use fluttering flags to symbolize the marching army led by General Li Jing, and the disappearance of fog to refer to the end of the war. The metaphorical expression in example (12), that fluttering flags symbolize the disappearance of fog, presents the situation that the army from Great Tang Empire defeated the invaders on the border in a figurative way.

### 3.4 *Rebel Is Fog*

Rebels usually are initiators of war. An Lushan Rebellion, a devastating rebellion against the Tang Dynasty of China, put the whole country in chaos and uproar. Some local separatist forces rose up against the royal court from time to time. The poet, Li Bai, witnessed the

turbulence of the political situation and felt very upset. Yet he could do nothing to change the situation and save the country. The verses in example (13) describe the scene that the poet gazed at the war-torn country and hoped that the war could be ended as soon as possible. Yet he did not express his hope explicitly. Instead, he compares fog to rebels and expresses his yearning to put an end to turmoil and warfare in a figurative way. This is where the poetic charm lies in.

(13) 关河望已绝，氛雾行当扫。 (李白《荆州贼平，临洞庭言怀作》)

*Guānhé wàng yǐ jué, fēnwù xíng dāng sǎo.* (Lǐ Bái Jīngzhōu Zèi Píng, Lín Dòngtíng Yánhuái Zuò)

I gazed at mountains and rivers;

the rebels should be subdued.

*Ode in Dongting after Suppression of Rebellion*

### 3.5 Nobility Is Fog

In traditional Chinese culture, clouds and fog are considered auspicious symbols, representing elegance and purity. Fog high in the sky is pure, which establishes a connection between fog and spiritual nobility. The verses in example (14) seem to describe the scenery, the moon and stars high in the sky as well as the floating cloud and fog. Yet the real intention is to express the idea that he is a man of virtue. The portrait of the scenery is intended to give weight to the poet's high morality in a vivid day.

(14) 磊落星月高，苍茫云雾浮。 (杜甫《发秦州》)

*Lěiluò xīngyuè gāo, cāngmáng yúnwù fú.* (Dù Fǔ Fā Qínzhōu)

Open and upright like the stars and the moon high in the sky,

vast and boundless like the floating cloud and the fog.

*Departure from Qinzhou*

### 3.6 Seclusion Is Fog

The way fog blankets a landscape, muffling sound, and obscuring details, can create an otherworldly atmosphere that inspires creativity and introspection. In fog, people can feel a transcendent spiritual purification, which brings joy to the soul. In addition, the beautiful scenery shrouded in clouds and fog also symbolizes the unpredictable and mysterious atmosphere of life, which makes people think about their own path of life and seek inner peace and tranquility.

Fog in ancient Chinese poetry acts as metaphor to symbolize seclusion. In some way, the establishment of the symbolic meaning of fog has its root in Taoism. Taoism, a highly influential philosophy that evolved about 2,500 years ago in China, has traditionally extolled those who lived like recluses and communed alone with nature. Hermits, unique images that ancient Chinese culture has nurtured, represent Chinese people's pursuit of an ideal way of

life. Hermits have lived in the mountains since ancient times. The places where Taoist rites are performed are suffused with fog, cloud and pine trees. Fog, which is floating in the sky freely, arouses the association of the unrestrained lifestyle of the recluses. Hermits in mountains are so close to nature that fog, as part of nature, is granted the symbolic significance of seclusion.

The poem in example (15) describes the poet's secluded life in Weicun and expresses his frustration because his talents were not recognized by those in power. In example (15), leopard in fog is used as a source domain to talk about his seclusion in Weicun. Leopard in fog is an allusion which derives from *Biography of Women*, which records the biographical stories of women in ancient China. According to this historical book, there is a black leopard in Nanshan Mountain that can survive seven consecutive days of foggy and rainy days without eating to form patterns so as to avoid predators. Then the term "leopard in fog" is used to refer to people who live in seclusion and retreat to avoid harm.

(15) 笼禽放高翥，雾豹得深藏。（白居易《渭村退居，寄礼部崔侍郎、翰林钱舍人诗一百韵》）

*Lóngqín fàng gāozhù, wùbào dé shēncáng.* (Bái Jūyì *Wèicūn Tuìjū, Jì Lǐbù Cuī Shìláng, Lànlin Qián Shèrén Shī Yībǎi Yùn*)

The caged bird flew high;

the leopard hid in the fog.

*To Cui Shilang in the Ministry of Rites and Qian Sheren in the Imperial Academy*

*While Living in Seclusion in Weicun*

The poem in example (16) conveys the poet's predicament. He felt lonely and lost because his talent was not given the due recognition. He expressed his dissatisfaction with his life and uncertainty about the future. The whole poem is full of sorrow and worry, but at the same time, there is also a glimmer of hope and confidence. The first verse in example (16) uses fog and rain to indicate his secluded life and the second verse conveys his hope for realization of his ambition one day.

(16) 雾雨十年同隐遁，风雷何日振沈潜。（韦庄《冬日长安感志寄献虢州崔郎中二十韵》）

*Wùyǔ shínián tóng yǐndùn, fēngléi hérì zhèn shěnqián.* (Wéi Zhuāng *Dōngrì Cháng'ān Gǎn Zhì Jìxiàn Guózhōu Cuī Lángzhōng Èrshí Yùn*)

I have been living in recluse like fog and rain for ten years.

When will wind and thunder shake the earth?

*A Letter to Cui Langzhong in Guohzhou from Chang'an in Winter*

Poets can appeal to the ordinary metaphors we live by in order to take us beyond them, to make us more insightful than we would be if we thought in standard ways (Lakoff & Turner,



1989, p. 215). Fog metaphors have been endowed with fascinating insights by great poets in the Tang Dynasty. We have investigated the fog metaphors in poetry of the Tang Dynasty with the help of MIP and classified them into six types: EMOTION IS FOG, BEAUTY IS FOG, WAR IS FOG, REBEL IS FOG, NOBILITY IS FOG and SECLUSION IS FOG. In the category EMOTION IS FOG, we sort out three subtypes: IGNORANCE IS FOG, MUDDLE IS FOG, and SADNESS IS FOG. According to the “embodied cultural prototype” view proposed by Kövecses (2000a, p. 14), we argue that metaphor is both motivated by the human physical experience and produced by a particular social and cultural environment. Firstly, the repeated experiences that people obtain from interactions with the physical world enable people to establish image schemas in their minds, which are highly abstract generalizations of their basic experiences. Human experiences with the physical world serve as a natural and logical foundation for the comprehension of more abstract concepts. The daily interactions with fog give people some inspirations to map properties to the source domain, fog to properties of the target domain. Firstly, fog is a natural occurrence that occurs when the air becomes saturated with water droplets, reducing visibility and enveloping the landscape in a veil of mist. The way fog obscures details can create an atmosphere of uncertainty, which arouses some negative feelings, such as ignorance, muddle and sadness. This may be the cognitive foundation of the metaphor EMOTION IS FOG. Secondly, fog also has aesthetic value, which means that fog can evoke a sense of beauty because fog has the qualities of being white, pure and mystical. Some metaphorical expressions of BEAUTY IS FOG capture this unique quality in poetry of the Tang Dynasty. Thirdly, fog is also used to refer to war in ancient Chinese poetry. Fog can bring about uncertainties and sadness, which helps establish a connection between fog and war as indicated by the metaphor WAR IS FOG. Fourthly, fog has a connection with rebels because rebels start rebellion and bring uncertainties, sufferings and sadness. This may be the cognitive basis of REBEL IS FOG. Fifthly, the purity of fog may be associated with nobility in traditional Chinese culture, which may generate the metaphor NOBILITY IS FOG. Lastly, fog can evoke feelings of mystery, tranquility, and a sense of being transported to another world. Hermits usually live in mountains enveloped by fog. The metaphor SECLUSION IS FOG may arise out of mysterious and ethereal nature of fog.

To study metaphor is to be confronted with hidden aspects of one’s own mind and one’s own culture (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 214). Apart from the motivation of human embodiment, Chinese cultural notions and philosophies may also play a role in the production of fog metaphors. In some way, the establishment of the symbolic meaning of fog has its root in Taoism, a philosophical tradition that has, along with Confucianism, shaped Chinese life for more than 2,000 years. Taoism advocates the philosophy of “the unity of man and the universe”. These are the four greatness in the universe, Tao, Heaven, Earth and Man. Man obeys the Way of Earth; Earth obeys the Way of Heaven; Heaven obeys the Way of Tao; Tao obeys the Way of Nature. Taoism asserts that man must place his will in harmony with the natural universe. The harmony between man and nature may motivate people to express their feelings and ideas through the qualities of some natural phenomena. Fog is one of the preferred natural phenomena selected by human beings to express their ideas and emotions. This may be the reason why fog is frequently used as the source domain to express some

abstract ideas. With the intrinsic associations with human beings in nature, fog metaphor may bring about rich connotations. Thus, the Chinese cultural context helps shape the typical Chinese values toward certain things and the metaphorical expressions serve as lens through which we can probe into the cultural patterns of the physical world.

#### 4. Conclusion

Metaphor is a universal way of thinking for people to comprehend new things. Conceptual metaphors underlie everyday language as well as poetic language. Fog, a very familiar natural phenomenon to human beings, has inspired poets and writers for centuries, evoking feelings of mystery, uncertainty, and introspection etc. As a frequently used image in the poetry of the Tang Dynasty, fog is rich in implications. Thus, the exploration into fog from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory may bring about some novel findings. The current study has identified six types of fog metaphors in poetry of the Tang Dynasty, EMOTION IS FOG, BEAUTY IS FOG, WAR IS FOG, REBEL IS FOG, NOBILITY IS FOG and SECLUSION IS FOG. Further exploration into the forces that may motivate the production of these fog metaphors proves that both human embodiment and cultural context play a crucial role in the formation of metaphorical expressions of fog.

The cognitive approach to fog metaphors in poetry of the Tang Dynasty in the current research may provide some implications for appreciation, translation and teaching of ancient Chinese poetry. Yet the current study is limited to fog metaphors in poetry of the Tang Dynasty. It would be interesting to go beyond the field of the current research to carry out comparative research on fog metaphors in different cultural backgrounds or comparative research on the development of fog metaphors in different periods. In addition, there are many other creative metaphors in ancient Chinese poetry. Conceptual metaphor theory provides a new perspective for researchers to dig up the thinking patterns behind the hidden cultural values.

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